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ABSTRACT

This digest reviews some of the related literature about the benefits of classroom drama activities and introduces a variety of resources to help educators incorporate dramatic activities in their language arts classrooms. The digest notes that although several terms have been used to refer to "classroom drama" such as creative dramatics, educational drama, theater games, sociodramatic play, role drama, and role playing, the terms "creative drama" and "drama in education" are umbrella concepts which embrace all the various types of improvised and informal drama used in classrooms. It cites the following relevant resources: five Internet-based drama education resources, six lesson plans, four professional organizations, two journals, and four books. (NKA)

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By

Sibel Tatar

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
and
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Dramatic Activities in Language Arts Classrooms: Resource Summary

By Sibel Tatar

Increasing numbers of teachers are discovering classroom drama to be highly valuable as an instructional tool (Kaaland-Wells, 1994). In dramatic activities, children learn to use language effectively and creatively while they are experiencing different points of views, looking for solutions, and discussing ideas. This digest will review some of the related literature regarding the benefits of classroom drama, as well as introduce a variety of resources to help educators incorporate dramatic activities in their language arts classrooms.

Although several terms have been used to refer to "classroom drama" such as creative dramatics, educational drama, theater games, sociodramatic play, role drama, and role playing, the terms "creative drama" and "drama in education" are umbrella concepts which embrace all the various types of improvised and informal drama used in classrooms. According to some authors, the goal and focus of creative drama are twofold: (1) creating "an experience through which students may come to understand human interactions, empathize with other people, and internalize alternative points of view" (Wagner, 1988, p. 5), and (2) developing understanding and learning through drama rather than "some finished product such as a well-mounted play" (Heinig, 1993, p. 22). In other words, the purpose of educational drama is not to produce a theater play for an audience but to contribute to students' personality growth and facilitate their learning by having them respond to situations, dilemmas, or conflicts assuming the role of imagined characters. It should be also noted that almost all students, regardless of their artistic skills for acting, can perform and benefit from this type of drama. For example, some of the techniques used in creative drama such as mime, movement exercises or invented dialogue give every child an opportunity to be actively engaged in drama without necessarily having to act or speak (Stewig, 2000).

According to Heining (1993, p. 6), the value of drama in teaching language arts comes from the fact that "learning language arts becomes more meaningful when it stimulates everyday life experiences." Dramatic performance can provide students an opportunity to use language to express various emotions, to solve problems, to make decisions, to socialize, and to develop empathy which eventually contributes to their self-esteem and creativity. In addition, drama activities may be useful in the development of oral communication skills, reading, and writing. Through drama, children may discover different styles and registers which are very different from their everyday speech. Wagner (1998) notes that "drama provides children with experiences that enhance their ability to judge the appropriateness of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies for a wide variety of imagined experiences" (p. 35). Drama has also been found by one author to be helpful for reading and writing skills: McCaslin (1990), for instance, argues that "most teachers find drama to be a strong motivation for reading and vocabulary building" (p. 291). The oral language skills developed through drama have also been found by some scholars to facilitate student's writing skills (Heathcote, 1981; Wagner, 1985).

Internet-based Drama Education Resources

Aaron Shepard's RT Page
http://aaronshep.com/rt/
This site, prepared by the award-winning children's author Aaron Shepard, offers several resources for reader's theater, among them scripts adapted from stories of Aaron Shepard and other authors, as well as online guide to scripting, staging, and performing.

Lisa Blau Homepage
http://www.lisablau.com/freescripts.html
Developed by Len Blau in memory of his wife, Lisa, a literacy educator, this page provides more than 25 free scripts for reader's theatre and is updated monthly.

Creative Drama & Theatre Education Resource Site
http://creativedrama.com/
This page is created and maintained by Janine Moyer Buesgen. It offers practical classroom ideas, book lists, theatre games, and scripts.

The Drama Teacher's Resource Room
http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/erachi/
Developed and maintained by Thornton Consulting & Training Services, this website offers ideas for classroom and stage, including articles on costume, props, set design, and lighting.

Drama Curriculum Guide
http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/artsed/g6arts_ed/g6rtblae.html
A part of Arts Education and Curriculum Guides of Saskatchewa, this website provides materials for educators interested in designing a drama curriculum for middle school students.

Lesson Plans

The Art of Creative Dramatics through the Eyes of a Young Child
http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1993/3/93.03.01.x.html

Drama for Those Who Do Not Like or Understand Drama
http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1983/5/83.05.03.x.html

The Creative Dramatics Cookbook: Recipes for Playmaking
http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1990/2/90.02.01.x.html

The Family on Stage: Creative Play Production in the Classroom
http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1980/3/80.03.07.x.html

Classroom Lesson Plans
http://www.geocities.com/Broadway/Alley/3765/lessons.html

Storytelling Activities & Lesson Ideas
http://www.storyarts.org/lessonplans/lessonideas/index.html

Sibel Tatar is a Reference Specialist at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, and is also a doctoral candidate in Language Education in the Indiana University School of Education, Bloomington, Indiana.

Professional Associations

American Alliance of Theatre and Education (AATE)
http://www.aate.com/
American Alliance of Theatre and Education (AATE) promotes standards for excellence in theatre and theatre education and provides a national resource network for professionals involved in theatre and drama in education.

Educational Theatre Association (EdTA)
http://www.edta.org/default_html.asp
Established in 1929, the EdTA provides professional development workshops and courses to classroom teachers. The Educational Theatre Association publishes "*Dramatics*" magazine, a monthly periodical for theatre students and teachers, and "*Teaching Theatre*", a quarterly journal for theatre educators.

International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ)
http://www.assitej.org/
ASSITEJ was established in 1965 and is today an international network of theatre for children and young people. ASSITEJ links thousands of theatres, organizations, and individuals through national centers in more than 70 countries.

I.D.E.A.: The International Drama/Theatre and Education Association
http://www.idea-info.org/index.htm
The International Drama/Theatre and Education Association (IDEA) was established in Oporto, Portugal in July, 1992. IDEA consists of several member associations representing more than 50 countries around the world. The association promotes and advocates for drama/theatre as part of a rich, full human education, and it provides an international forum for those working as drama/theatre educators throughout the world.

Journals

Drama Matters
http://www.coe.ohio-state.edu/edtl/llc/
Drama Matters is a journal published with the support of the Ohio State University and the Ohio Drama and Education Exchange. The journal provides a forum for the discussion of the theory and practice of drama and theatre education. It is designed to appeal to a wide range of readers including students, elementary and secondary teachers, drama/theatre practitioners, and academics from a variety of fields.

Research in Drama Education
http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/carfax/13569783.html
Research in Drama Education is an international, refereed journal aimed at those interested in drama and theatre conducted in educational contexts. It disseminates completed research and research in progress, and through its Viewpoint section it encourages debate among researchers, both on its published articles and on other matters.

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Books

Title: CREATIVE DRAMATICS IN THE CLASSROOM: Curriculum Unit.
Author: Lanning, Colleen Caine.
Publisher: Rocky River, OH: The Center for Learning.
Year: 1997
ISBN: 1560774916
Abstract: This book, which includes 12 cross-disciplinary lessons, can be used both as a supplementary text or standard text. Each lesson is presented with objectives, notes, procedures for 2-7 activities, and reproducible handouts. Lessons cover vocal expression (volume, rate, pitch, stress, chanting, choral speaking, and Reader's Theatre), body language (gesture, facial expression, posture and pantomime), and character creation.

Title: DRAMA FOR LEARNING: Dorothy Heathcote's mantle of the expert approach to education.
Authors: Heathcote, Dorothy; Bolton, Gavin M.
Publisher: Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Year: 1995
ISBN: 043508643X
Abstract: In this book, the authors describe a teaching approach called "Mantle of the Expert". Based on the idea that contextualization is the key factor in meaningful teaching, the book describes how theater can create an impetus for productive learning across the curriculum.

Title: THE CREATIVE CLASSROOM: A Guide for Using Creative Drama in the Classroom, PreK-6.
Author: Kelner, Lenore Blank.
Publisher: Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Year: 1993
ISBN: 0435086286
Abstract: This book consists of creative drama activities that introduce, review, and reinforce content material across the curriculum. Step-by-step procedural outlines and actual scripts are included.

Title: CREATIVE DRAMA IN THE CLASSROOM (5TH Ed.).
Author: McCaslin, Nellie.
Publisher: NEW YORK: Longman.
Year: 1990
ISBN: 080130380X
Abstract: Calling for the increased use of dramatic activities as a means of building basic language skills and student self-image, this practical resource contains suggestions for their implementation and examples of the effective use of drama in lessons from various grade levels. The specific chapters in the book address creative drama as a socializing activity, playtime leading to pantomime, improvisation, the use of puppets and masks, creating plays from popular stories and poems, speech activities, and attending and appreciating drama performances.

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